

Effectiveness of Role-Play in Improving Communication Skills: Evidence from University Students of Hospitality Studies

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Abstract

Role play is increasingly used as a teaching strategy to enhance communication skills in higher education; however, empirical evidence from hospitality education in Nepal remains lacking. This study examines students' perceptions towards role play and its effectiveness in enhancing their communication skills. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, and data were collected from 40 undergraduate students, equally distributed by year of study (60% first year, 40% second year) as they are involved in hospitality practical sessions where role play is conducted. A structured 7-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to measure students' perception and perceived communication outcomes. Descriptive analysis revealed students' positive perception towards role play experience, with a mean score of 5.10. Further, correlation analysis found statistically significant positive relationships between role play and communication variables, with coefficients ranging from .577 to .808. The findings suggest that role play is perceived as an effective instructional strategy for improving communication confidence, pronunciation, and clarity of expression. The study offers practical implications for hospitality educators and contributes institution level empirical evidence to the literature.

Keywords: role play, communication skills, student perception, experiential learning, hospitality education

Introduction

Communication skills are essential skills for students in hospitality education, where professional success depends heavily on interpersonal interaction. Despite this importance, many students struggle with confidence, clarity, and spontaneous expression

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in spoken communication. Traditional classroom approaches often emphasize theoretical knowledge while offering limited opportunities for authentic interaction.

Role play has emerged as a practical solution to this challenge by providing students with simulated real-life communication scenarios. Through role play, learners actively engage in dialogue, and practice professional interaction in a controlled environment. By attending role play, students understand words based on its context (Wulandari et al., 2019), improve student confidence and willingness to communicate (Rahman & Maarof, 2018), and understand their role in the future (Cruz & Thornton, 2010). Role-play is taken as important element in classroom because it has to be finished by the students as a communicative activity (Adnan et al., 2012). Role-play encourages learners to communicate and express themselves bravely (Altun, 2015) and progress risk-taking attribute as well (Ishak & Aziz, 2022). Additionally, it is widely used by teaching institutions to develop soft skill (Jayanti, 2022) such as spontaneity and adaptability (Hussam & Saeed, 2025) in communication of young learners.

Studies consistently report positive effects of role play on communication skill development. Altun (2015) studied the impact of role-play on communication skills of foreign language learners where they found role play as a significant developer of self-confidence of learners. Further, they found students exposed to role play demonstrating higher levels of pronunciation and interactional competence than those taught using traditional methods. Based on the Meta-analysis and synthesis of research studies between the year 2010 to 2022, Ishak and Aziz (2022) found that the role-play influence and improved students' speaking abilities and assisted students to gain confidence in their ability to communicate.

Student perception has been identified as a key factor influencing learning outcomes. Mulyana (2020) reported that over 70% of respondents in his study perceived role play as enjoyable and effective, with mean perception scores above 4.00. Similarly, Salainti (2024) found that role play reduced communication anxiety and increased peer interaction, as reflected in higher mean confidence scores. Wulandari et al. (2019) examined the effects of role-play on students' communicative competence. They surveyed 108 university students in Indonesia through questionnaire and interview. The study found that the role-play improves communication competence, increases vocabularies, and adds experience on knowledge.

Pinela et al. (2025) examined the impact of tourism-based role-play activities on students' oral fluency in English. Following mixed-methods approach, the study used quantitative data and qualitative insights from 50 students at costal university in

Ecuador. The study found role-play as an effective strategy in strengthening communicative competence of the students.

In context of Nepal, Neupane (2019) conducted an experimental research to examine the effectiveness of role play technique in improving English speaking. The study was carried at Lamjung among 40 students and the study was conducted through observation and speaking test. Compared to the control group, the study found role play having important pedagogical implication to improve communication skill as well as significant effect on students' speaking skills. Considering the importance of role-play in education, this study examines the association of classroom role-play with communication skills of hospitality sector students pursuing their Bachelor of Hotel Management program in Lalitpur, Nepal.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional approach to explore student's perceptions of role play as a learning strategy. This design is appropriate for capturing measurable attitudes and self-reported outcomes at a single point in time, particularly in relation to communication skill development. The research was conducted among undergraduate students of hotel management, focusing specifically on first- and second-year students, as they regularly participate in hospitality practical sessions where role play has been integrated. A total of 40 students took part in the study, comprising 24 first-year and 16 second-year students, with a nearly equal representation of male and female respondents where 47.5% were male and 52.5% were female. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to gather both demographic information and perceptions of role play and its role on communication skills such as confidence, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Responses were recorded using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing for precise measurement of frequencies and variance. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics and response patterns. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency of the measurement items, while Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationships among the key variables under study.

Results

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis confirmed acceptable internal consistency for all scales. Cronbach's alpha values were .810 for the Role Play Experience, .839 for Vocabulary Development,

.822 for Communication Confidence, and .885 for Pronunciation, all exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics of perceptual data collected from the survey is presented in Table 1. The role play showed a moderately high mean score ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.20$), indicating a generally favorable perception of role play activities among students. Vocabulary development recorded the highest mean value ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.15$), suggesting that students perceived noticeable improvement in their vocabulary through instructional activities. Communication confidence also demonstrated a relatively high mean score ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 0.98$), reflecting positive confidence in communication. Pronunciation ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.21$) demonstrated relatively high mean scores, reflecting positive outcomes.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Perception on the Variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Role play	1	6.67	5.1	1.19639
Vocabulary Development	1	6.67	5.1417	1.14948
Communication Confidence	2.33	6.67	4.8417	0.98417
Pronunciation	1	6.33	4.8583	1.21455

Note. $N= 40$.

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficients among role play (RP), vocabulary development (VD), communication confidence (CC), and pronunciation (P) is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

Variables	RP	VD	CC	P
RP	1			
VD	.775**	1		
CC	.764**	.577**	1	
P	.808**	.764**	.639**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between role play and all communication skills. Role play is strongly correlated with vocabulary development ($r = .775, p < .01$) and strongly associated with communication confidence ($r = .764, p < .01$) and pronunciation ($r = .808, p < .01$). Vocabulary development also demonstrated significant positive correlations with communication confidence ($r = .577, p < .01$) and pronunciation ($r = .764, p < .01$). Communication confidence is positively related to pronunciation ($r = .639, p < .01$). These results indicate that higher engagement in role play activities in classroom is associated with stronger perceived communication outcomes in terms of vocabulary development, communication confidence, and pronunciation.

Discussion

The findings of this study are largely consistent with previous research that highlights the effectiveness of role play in enhancing communication skills among hospitality students. The generally favorable perception of role play observed in this study supports earlier findings that students view role play as engaging, relevant, and beneficial for learning (Mulyana, 2020; Salainti, 2024). In line with Wulandari et al. (2019) and Ishak and Aziz (2022), vocabulary development emerged as the strongest outcome, suggesting that interactive communication enables students to acquire and retain professional language more effectively. The positive student perception noted in this study further reinforces the idea that when learners find instructional activities meaningful, they are more likely to participate actively and achieve better learning outcomes.

The findings strongly reinforce prior evidence on vocabulary development. Vocabulary recorded the highest mean score and showed a strong positive correlation with role play, which is consistent with Wulandari et al. (2019), who found that contextualized interaction during role play enhances vocabulary acquisition and communicative competence.

The positive relationship between role play and communication confidence is also consistent with earlier findings. Studies by Rahman and Maarof (2018) and Altun (2015) emphasized that role play helps learners overcome anxiety and develop self-confidence by allowing them to rehearse interactions in a low-risk environment.

Pronunciation also demonstrated a strong positive association with role play, reinforcing conclusions drawn by Altun (2015) and Pinela et al. (2025), who reported improvements in oral fluency and interactional competence among students exposed to role play-based instruction. The findings suggest that repeated spoken practice in realistic scenarios helps students become more aware of pronunciation patterns and improves clarity in speech.

The results indicate that role play has clear pedagogical value in strengthening students' speaking abilities. The significant interrelationships among vocabulary, confidence, and pronunciation suggest that these communication skills develop simultaneously through sustained role play practice. Overall, the findings reaffirm role play as an effective instructional strategy for developing communication competence in hospitality education, particularly within the Nepalese context.

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